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ENDERS'S END

THE REPLACEMENT of Thomas Enders as the State Department's top policymaker for Latin America and of Deane Hinton as ambassador to El Salvador have been portrayed as part of a move to "toughen" U.S. policy on Central America, as a power grab by the White House national security adviser, William Clark, at the expense of Secretary of State George Shultz, and as a triumph of hardliners such as U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick and C.I.A. Director William Casey over "soft" foreign service careerists. Actually the situation is both simpler than all that and more complex. Personality differences played a big part in Enders's sacking. Hinton was not sacked at all. The personnel changes were not the result of a change in overall policy toward Central America, but of a determination by Clark that policy was not being effectively implemented. Clark has not executed a Kissinger-style power play, though; on the contrary, Enders was ousted as part of a plan to shift operational control of Central America policy from the White House back to State. And at State, the new Assistant Secretary for Latin America, Langhorne Motley, and the new ambassador in San Salvador, Thomas Pickering, are not noticeably harder-line on policy than Enders and Hinton were. State's original choice for the ambassador's job, John Negroponte, a career diplomat who is currently ambassador to Honduras, actually was rejected by the White House as having too hardline a reputation in Congress.

NEVERTHELESS, the Administration's policy is inexorably becoming "tougher" as the military situation in El Salvador deteriorates and that in Nicaragua improves. At least in the short run, the new personnel changes will do nothing to alter the general drift toward military solutions. Clark, instinctively hardline, has not stolen power, but he has demonstrated that he has it. Shultz, more of a moderate, has yet to show that he can get it back. Clark's fellow hardliners, including Kirkpatrick, had lost some major policy fights to Enders, but in the end they won his scalp, and that enhances their influence. One of these days—after the 1984 election, if it can be put off until then—there may be a decisive struggle over Central America within the Administration, probably over whether or not to send U.S. combat troops or large numbers of advisers to the region—to win it or stay out. At the moment, it's likely that debate will continue over how best to win while staying out and how best to handle domestic opponents of Administration policy—by conciliation and persuasion or by threat and confrontation.

Thomas Enders's friends in the State Department and enemies among Democrats on Capitol Hill find it laughable that he should be cast now as some kind of dove. Ten years ago, as No. 2 man in the U.S. embassy in Phnom Penh, Enders selected targets for secret U.S. bombing raids in Cambodia, earning the respectful notice of Alexander Haig, then chief of staff to President Nixon. As Ronald Reagan's first Secretary of State, Haig intended to pursue a high-tension policy against Latin American Communists, and he selected Enders to help carry out his aims even though Enders had no prior Latin experience. (He has since become fluent in Spanish, no mean feat while working sixteen-hour days as a policy manager.) Haig originally wanted a direct confrontation with Cuba, the "source" of trouble in Central America, but the Administration instead chose quieter options—covert aid to anti-government guerrillas in Nicaragua and stepped-up military aid to the government of El Salvador. Enders supported both—and also backed a process of negotiation with leftists and pressure for human rights reform in El Salvador to an extent that aroused suspicion among the Administration's hardest liners.

Enders's personal and management style did not endear him to his adversaries. He is an imperious, icy man who at six foot-eight acts as though he is used to looking down at other people. One State Department official said, "If Enders had done the same things he did, but had the personality of George Shultz, he'd still be here. The Reaganites like to sit around comfortably and talk about things. You can't do that with Enders present." Enders also is described as "extremely turf conscious," unwilling or unable to delegate authority, and disrespectful of other people's prerogatives. "The White House felt that Enders, not Shultz, was running Latin American policy," one aide said. "Enders really didn't report to anybody." When C.I.A. Director Casey wanted State to release new data on Communist supply lines to El Salvador, Enders sat on the information and deprecated it as "warmed-over leftovers." He got it into his head that Spanish Prime Minister Felipe González could be brought into Central America diplomacy and flew off to see him without consulting anyone, leading the White House to decree that henceforth no one travels without permission.

From the standpoint of Enders's friends at State and elsewhere, the issues over which he was ousted transcend style and concern methods of implementing policy. They say he wanted to conduct it as quietly as possible, so as not to arouse public and congressional opposition, whereas others, including Ambassador Kirkpatrick, wanted to crystallize issues and confront and defeat the opposition.

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